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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan

Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 14 of General Assembly resolution 53/203 B of 18 December 1998, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-fourth session a report on actions taken pursuant to the resolution. The report covers developments from the issuance of the previous report of the Secretary-General to the Assembly on the subject (A/53/346, dated 4 September 1998), until 1 July 1999.

II. Review of major humanitarian developments

2. The operating environment for the humanitarian assistance community continues to be characterized by a complicated web of internal and external political and military influences. The first half of 1999 has seen the humanitarian condition of the country worsen, owing to the enduring instability, conflict and natural disasters.

3. In Hazarajat, the wave of conflict in the districts of Bamian, Shiber and Yakaolang from March to May 1999 caused renewed displacement with an estimated 20,000 people leaving their homes in Bamian and Shiber and an unknown number leaving Yakaolang. With no immediate prospect of a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan, further fighting and population displacements were foreseen in the latter half of 1999.

4. The conflict continues to affect all aspects of civilian life in many parts of Afghanistan. Families lack access to adequate services or the means to provide for themselves. The combatants still deny most humanitarian agencies effective access to many areas, including parts of northern Kabul, the Parwan and Kapisa provinces, and districts within central Afghanistan.

5. The absence of United Nations international staff from Afghanistan from August 1998 until March 1999, owing to security concerns, limited the capacity of the aid community to provide assistance to the people of Afghanistan and to engage in continued dialogue with Afghan authorities on policy issues. However, starting in early 1999, gradual progress began to be made on security issues and towards the eventual implementation of the May 1998 Memorandum of Understanding between the Taliban and the United Nations.

6. At the request of the Taliban authorities, the United Nations Coordinator for Afghanistan visited Kandahar in early February to discuss issues related to the security of United Nations staff and premises and the return of international staff to Afghanistan. A security assessment to determine the feasibility of re-establishing an international staff presence in the country was carried out in all major regional capitals of the country during February and March. As a consequence, there has been a phased return of United Nations international staff, based on prevailing security conditions and the deployment of United Nations field security officers in five designated regions.

7. While United Nations international staff have maintained a permanent presence in Kabul since March, re-engagement in other areas has been gradual and on a rotational basis. Currently, several international staff are present in Herat dealing, *inter alia*, with the issue of refugees returning from the Islamic Republic of Iran.

8. Contact was first established with the United Front in March 1999. This was followed by a first mission of United Nations international staff to northern Afghanistan in May, with participation of representatives from the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Special Mission in Afghanistan (UNSMA). A second mission took place in early June.

9. Regarding the refugee situation, there has been a significant increase in the number of refugees returning from the Islamic Republic of Iran during 1999. The expected returnee caseload of 5,000 included in the 1999 consolidated inter-agency appeal has been revised to 104,000. Not all refugees have returned voluntarily. It has been a concern that the rights of refugees outside Afghanistan, as well as returnees to the country, are respected regardless of ethnicity. The increase in returnees is a concern to the Taliban authorities as well as to the humanitarian agencies who, with limited resources, are now faced with the significant challenge of adequately supporting resettlement, and ensuring that the rights of returnees are protected.

10. The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan continues to be compounded by natural disaster. On 11 February 1999, an earthquake measuring 5.5 on the Richter Scale struck the Wardak and Logar provinces affecting some 16,000 families in several districts. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), supported by United Nations agencies, the International Federation of Red Cross Societies and non-

governmental organizations, coordinated health activities and undertook immediate measures to strengthen the surveillance system of the local health authorities, especially for respiratory infections and water-borne diseases. Shelter materials were distributed to the affected families, and WFP food rations were distributed to targeted vulnerable families and to those who had lost their food stocks.

III. Socio-economic developments

11. Afghanistan's socio-economic situation remains a major concern for the aid community. The complete absence of adequate social services provides the major focus for much of the assistance community's activities. Massive unemployment, caused by the collapse of formal institutions, continues to fuel large-scale illicit economic activities. As a consequence, little or no revenues are collected or can be made available to finance socio-economic development.

12. The unabated decline of the economy exacerbates the level of poverty and economic hardships throughout the country. Widespread dependence on subsistence agriculture, diminishing levels of income, declining food security, reduced access to urgently needed services and an expanding population are among the factors contributing to the socio-economic vulnerability of the population.

13. Wide disparities exist between and within regions. Herat, Jalalabad and Kandahar have largely benefited from cross-border trading with neighbouring countries. In contrast, the northern provinces, in particular, the isolated and chronic food deficit provinces of Badakhshan and Bamian, have been badly affected by the natural disasters and heavy fighting that took place in August and September 1998. The provinces of Parwan and Kapisa are reportedly under a tough blockade imposed by the Taliban authorities, which has caused a tremendous increase in the cost of essential items.

14. Humanitarian assistance programmes continue to be adversely affected by the lack of access of women and girls to health, education and employment opportunities. While there have been some improvements in some areas, the overall situation remains bleak.

15. In recent years, the country has become more vulnerable to economic developments in neighbouring countries, particularly Pakistan. For example, an increase in the prices of essential commodities in Pakistan led to a further increase in prices in Kabul, Jalalabad and Kandahar. In addition, the unofficial devaluation of the Pakistani currency during the last several months of 1998 caused a further reduction in the value of the Afghan currency.

IV. Assistance provided by the United Nations and its partners

A. Food aid

16. Food aid has been made available to vulnerable populations and to those who lack purchasing power. The supply of food assistance is guided by the vulnerability analysis and mapping exercise, which estimates the number of households at risk. WFP has planned to distribute 96,800 tons of food aid during the course of 1999 to over one million beneficiaries, of whom at least 55 per cent are females. During the first six months of the year, 35,000 tons of food were distributed to 900,000 vulnerable people in Afghanistan, through support to the relief and rehabilitation activities described below.

17. There are currently three bakery projects, two year-round bakeries in Kabul and a seasonal bakery in Jalalabad to cover the winter months. Thus far in 1999, WFP bakery projects have processed 24,000 tons of wheat for the benefit of 420,000 people. In addition, the "widows' bakery" has managed to secure regular employment for 259 women.

18. Emergency food distributions have taken place in response to food shortages during the lean winter months and following natural disasters. Winter emergency operations have provided 10,459 tons of food for approximately 372,000 people.

19. WFP has provided 1,500 tons of food assistance, through institutions, for some 60,000 Afghans. During the past six months, WFP provided 300 kg of wheat to each returnee family arriving from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan under the voluntary repatriation programme of UNHCR. It is estimated that 63,000 people were assisted with around 2,600 tons of wheat.

20. Between January and June 1999, over 2,000 tons of wheat were provided as wages to over 30,000 labourers working on a total of 42 food-for-wages projects across the country. Those activities include repairing drinking-water systems, building flood protection structures, sanitation and drainage work and the construction of housing for returning refugees and internally displaced people.

21. WFP has also carried out a food-for-training incentive, a scheme whereby a ration is offered to family members who undertake training. A similar food-for-seeds initiative aims

to improve the quality of seed available to Afghan farmers. To date, 650 tons of food have been distributed to 4,800 people in the context of those two projects.

B. Health

22. Priority health programmes undertaken by United Nations specialized agencies include immunization, human resource development, expansion of the integrated disease control activities and maternal and child health care. The World Health Organization (WHO) has carried out basic programmes for the control of malaria and tuberculosis. In collaboration with national authorities, WHO, UNICEF and other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations conducted a workshop in March 1999 to develop a work plan for the health sector.

23. In the winter of 1998, Afghanistan experienced higher-than-usual levels of acute respiratory infections. A preparedness campaign supported by WHO and UNICEF in 200 health facilities helped to reduce the mortality rate. Additional training has been provided to health personnel on the prevention, control and management of diarrhoeal diseases.

24. UNICEF and WHO, in collaboration with national authorities and other partners, implemented two successful rounds of national immunization days for polio eradication for children under the age of five in May and June 1999, respectively. Immunization was done in the Parwan and Kapisa provinces, currently under the control of the Northern Alliance, and in Bamian province, where there has been recent fighting. Preliminary results indicate a 90 per cent coverage of the target group.

25. Tuberculosis is a major public health problem in Afghanistan. The introduction of the Directly Observed Treatment Short-Course in WHO-assisted tuberculosis facilities has paved the way for its future as the backbone of the country's control strategy for the disease.

26. In close cooperation with national authorities and concerned non-governmental organizations, WHO and UNICEF are promoting safe motherhood initiatives in Afghanistan with additional support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). With a view to strengthening the capacity of the existing health facilities to provide quality maternal health-care services, 58 female health personnel have been trained in essential obstetric care and basic obstetric care equipment and supplies were provided to health facilities in the region. WHO, WFP and non-governmental organizations facilitated the training of 570 traditional birth attendants in five regions. These trained attendants are now serving women in more than 700 villages throughout the country.

27. The annual number of malaria cases in Afghanistan is estimated to be on the order of 3 to 4 million. The ongoing activities of WHO include the training of different categories of health workers in six provinces; provision of medicines and other supplies; development of teaching-learning materials in local languages; and coordination with different stakeholders involved in anti-malaria and anti-leishmaniasis activities. WHO also initiated the establishment of regional technical committees on malaria and leishmaniasis in Kabul, Jalalabad and Kunduz.

28. The United Nations Office for Project Services, through the Afghanistan Rural Rehabilitation Programme, carries out health-related activities at the village, cluster village and district levels. Those activities are identified as priority needs by local communities and include the training of female and male health workers, construction of pit latrines (more than 3,000), conducting a participatory rural appraisal for women's health, construction or rehabilitation of hospitals and clinics, community-based health education and household gardens for better nutrition.

29. The Comprehensive Disabled Afghans Programme of the United Nations Office for Project Services has continued to serve the needs of about 30,000 disabled people in Afghanistan through a large community-based rehabilitation programme, orthopaedic workshops, physiotherapy services and employment support. Within the context of common programming, it has conducted national workshops and seminars with about 30 agencies to agree on policy and standardization on physiotherapy training, orthopaedic technology, and microcredit. It has also initiated the development of a national deaf sign language for Afghanistan.

30. On 13 February 1999, an outbreak of an unidentified disease was reported in the isolated district of Darwaz in Badakhshan province. It killed over 200 people, mostly children. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan facilitated logistical support from the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan for the dispatch of a WHO specialized team to the area to investigate the disease. The outbreak was identified as an influenza-A epidemic with secondary bacterial complications causing high rates of pneumonia. Most of the deaths were caused by secondary bacterial infections, which had been made worse by poor hygiene, sanitation and nutrition, the lack of antibiotics and crowded living conditions.

C. Water and sanitation

31. The provision of clean drinking water and improvements in sanitary conditions remains critical to the reduction of morbidity and mortality rates, especially among children in Afghanistan. The healthy city/health education project of WHO and the healthy village project were completed in Jalalabad and Kandahar, respectively. In collaboration with WFP, UNHCR and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan, water and sanitation and hospital rehabilitation projects have been implemented in Kabul, Zabul, Kandahar and Uruzgan.

32. UNICEF continued its integrated water, sanitation and hygienic education activities in four districts. Female social mobilizers participate in hygiene promotion activities in three of the four districts. UNICEF, WHO and non-governmental organizations designed a standard model for dug-well platforms for Afghanistan. An oral rehydration treatment, hygiene education and sanitation campaign is planned for 26 to 30 June 2000.

33. The United Nations Office for Project Services/ Afghanistan Rural Rehabilitation Programme is involved in construction or improvement of shallow wells, construction of tube wells, construction of village/district water-supply systems and spring protection in 25 districts. Some 58 subprojects are under way to provide safe drinking water to the rural population of Afghanistan, thereby minimizing the spread of water-borne diseases. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements is carrying out rehabilitation projects in the areas of water supply, drainage, solid waste collection and an environment programme.

D. Education

34. The education system in Afghanistan is in ruins. Local authorities provide minimal support to the education sector and, although public schools exist, there are no textbooks or other teaching aids. Despite the enormous need for education, resistance from the authorities, lack of access for girls and scarcity of funds has limited educational opportunities for the population.

35. Notwithstanding the above, some activities have been possible. In collaboration with a non-governmental organization, UNICEF supported formal primary education for girls and boys in Badakhshan. In the eastern region, it continued support to community-based girls' schools through the provision of teaching/learning materials and teacher training. Through another non-governmental organization, UNICEF supported winter schools for poor rural children in remote villages of the Central Highlands. In Herat, teaching and learning materials were provided to internally displaced children in camps.

36. UNICEF and Save the Children USA organized two workshops on minimum learning levels for maths and languages in Dari/Pashtu, for grades 1 to 6, which was attended by a wide range of Afghan education experts. UNICEF has distributed the Dari translations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to Taliban officials and community members for rights-advocacy purposes.

37. The United Nations Office for Project Services/ Afghanistan Rural Rehabilitation Programme supports a total of 23 non-formal education projects targeting out-of-school children, which include construction/reconstruction of boys' and girls' schools, provision of textbooks to 10,000 students and vocational training in different trades. Under the Poverty Eradication and Community Empowerment (PEACE) initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Office for Project Services has recently launched a major programme on basic primary education in southern Afghanistan. Through the community forums established by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, a total of 1,000 girls are receiving home-based education in Kabul. This is a significant number in view of the restrictions imposed on girls' education by the authorities.

38. UNESCO has developed a resource package on conflict resolution and culture of peace containing around 60 titles of supplementary reading materials in Dari and Pashtu languages, which will be disseminated to schools in Afghanistan. With support from UNDP, UNESCO launched the Education for All-2000 assessment for Afghanistan. The findings of this assessment will quantify educational issues and serve as an advocacy tool to mobilize support for educational development and reconstruction in Afghanistan.

E. Mine action

39. Afghanistan remains severely affected by landmines and unexploded ordnance. The Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan, with its workforce of some 4,700, undertakes a diverse range of activities including coordination and implementation of mine-awareness education, technical training related to mine action, general and technical information gathering as well

as clearance of areas contaminated by mine and unexploded ordnance.

40. The current known area contaminated by landmines in Afghanistan is 701.5 square kilometres (km^2), which is spread throughout the country. Much of this is land that could otherwise be used for productive economic and social purposes. Of this, 314 km^2 are assessed as being vitally important residential areas, commercial land, roads, irrigation systems and primary production land. In areas contaminated by landmines, there is an equally significant and serious problem posed by the existence of unexploded ordnance. While overall national figures on the rate of mine and unexploded ordnance casualties are not available, the Mine Action Programme estimates that non-combatant casualties may still be as high as 150 to 250 per month.

41. The Programme plans, manages and integrates its activities with the other sectoral programmes implemented by other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. Nine Afghan non-governmental organizations and four international non-governmental organizations undertake implementation of the Programme's activities. In addition, one Iranian non-governmental organization is also involved in mine-awareness training to the refugees returning from the Islamic Republic of Iran. Field-level planning, coordination and quality control is carried out by the Regional Mine Action Centres located in Kabul, Kandahar, Herat and Jalalabad.

42. In 1999, the Mine Action Programme aims to clear up to 42 km^2 of high priority mined area and 48.5 km^2 of former battle area, and to survey and mark 41 km^2 of minefield and 51.5 km^2 of battle terrain. In addition, it plans to provide mine-awareness training to one million people, provide the necessary staff training and maintain the Programme's standards and existing capacity.

F. Food and agriculture

43. The United Nations food and agriculture programme for Afghanistan, an important component of the UNDP PEACE initiative, is implemented by FAO in collaboration with WFP and other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. Through its sustainable crop production, FAO continued its activities aimed at improving food security through interventions that also have positive effects on improving employment opportunities, income-generation and building self-reliance and governance capacity in rural areas of Afghanistan.

44. In the livestock sector, FAO continues to support 255 district-based veterinary field units across the country, including those in northern region, Bamian and other areas which are currently not easily accessible. Veterinary field units have developed a high degree of self-sustainability through a "user pays" cost-recovery system and they are also supported by a Veterinary Services Association. Technical training has been provided for livestock production field staff and refresher training for the veterinarians at the Kabul-based Veterinary Training Centre.

45. Through nine subprojects, the Afghanistan Rural Rehabilitation Programme is undertaking an environmental protection programme, fruit trees nursery raising and training, sericulture rehabilitation and training for women, mulberry production, fertilizer fund, wheat seed multiplication and dissemination of vegetable gardening.

G. Rural and urban rehabilitation

46. Rebuilding communities in rural and urban areas is a major focus of the PEACE initiative, which began in 1997 and extends through 1999. Under the aegis of the Afghanistan Rural Rehabilitation Programme, community development meetings are arranged at the village, cluster village and district levels, during which the participants assess their needs and priorities. The assessments in turn form the basis for the formulation of subprojects. To support irrigation, 108 subprojects have been implemented or are under implementation, including rehabilitation/ construction of canal intakes, canal protection walls and canal crossings. Some 90 subprojects for construction or reconstruction of roads, culverts and bridges are helping people in Afghanistan to market their agricultural products and boost incomes.

47. The rural credit and income-generation programme of the Rehabilitation Programme focuses on persons below the poverty line, including widows, disabled persons and the most vulnerable. A total of 91 subprojects has either been implemented or are under implementation. Some 100 village revolving funds have been established, and will be able at some point to fund social activities such as education and health. Other activities under this sector include the construction of shops for the impoverished, provision of transport services and income-generation through credit schemes.

48. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements carried out activities in five principal urban centres of Afghanistan with the assistance of community forums established at each city. Unfortunately, the Centre had to suspend activities in Bamian, owing to recent fighting.

Within the framework of the PEACE initiative, the Centre has been able to form women's community forums in Kandahar with the agreement of the Taliban. These local community organizations develop local systems of governance, create sustainable livelihoods and provide social services for the community. In Kabul, community forum representatives, municipality members and Taliban officials are expected to sign a protocol of understanding aimed at legalizing the existing and future community forums, including four for women in the north of the city.

H. Voluntary repatriation

49. After two decades of conflict and following nearly a decade of repatriation efforts, there are still 2.6 million Afghan refugees in the two main neighbouring countries (1.4 million in the Islamic Republic of Iran and 1.2 million in Pakistan). Both countries have shown an exemplary hospitality in accommodating Afghan refugees. However, the continued burden of this huge caseload, diminishing prospects for a speedy settlement of the conflict, dwindling international resources and the prevailing economic difficulties in both countries of asylum have badly affected the long-held asylum traditions.

50. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, these factors have caused a large number of forcible returns or deportations affecting mainly undocumented refugees. In discussions with UNHCR, the Iranian authorities have reiterated their preference for voluntary repatriation, which would hopefully lead to an early suspension of deportations, resumption of an organized voluntary repatriation programme and establishment of an agreed mechanism for ensuring that undocumented Afghans with legitimate claims continue to receive protection in that country. In Pakistan, while refugees are still welcome, the Government is equally keen to see Afghans return in significant numbers to ease the burden of continued hospitality.

51. As of mid-June 1999, a total of 53,327 refugees have voluntarily repatriated from Pakistan to Afghanistan, mainly to rural areas in the eastern and southern regions of the country. The numbers are likely to increase in the coming summer months. By the end of 1999, some 200,000 Afghan refugees are expected to return from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. At the end of June 1999, UNHCR was in the process of initiating three organized voluntary return convoys from the Islamic Republic of Iran for a total of some 1,500 Afghans.

52. These developments are viewed within the context of the improved security situation inside Afghanistan. Large areas of the country have remained stable and peaceful for a number of years now and provide an opportunity for many of the refugees currently in the Islamic Republic of Iran and, more so, in Pakistan, to return safely. The majority of these refugees are often willing to return voluntarily, but require adequate financial support from the international community for their dignified return and sustainable reintegration. For these returnees as well as the millions who have returned in prior years, resumption of their lives in a devastated and greatly changed country continues to pose a challenge.

53. Under the present circumstances, UNHCR activities have increasingly focused on monitoring the situation of returnees at their places of origin and return. A monitoring system is in place that aims to systematically evaluate the situation of returnees through interviews with individual heads of families. The surveys form the basis for interventions by UNHCR with regard both to the protection of returnees and their human rights and assistance measures to address their needs, the latter in cooperation with other humanitarian agencies within the framework of the Principled Common Programming for Afghanistan.

54. In the first five months of 1999, the monitoring survey covered 5,500 returnees (982 families), of which 59 per cent had repatriated from Pakistan and 41 per cent had been forcibly returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran. While a great majority of up to 91 per cent of the returnees from Pakistan feel safe after return, 46 per cent of the returnees from the Islamic Republic of Iran report concerns for their personal security, owing in part to the presence of landmines. While 90 per cent and more of those who returned from Pakistan were able to return to their places of origin, the majority of those forcibly returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran became internally displaced after return. Of the interviewed returnees from Pakistan, 68 per cent have access to health facilities within reachable distance from their places of return. The findings with regard to access to education remain alarming, with only 30 per cent of the interviewed families having one or more children of school age who attend school after their return from Pakistan.

55. The current United Nations security regime and the severe funding crisis facing Afghan operations in general, and the UNHCR repatriation programme in particular, have seriously curtailed the aid community's collective ability to provide protection and assistance to the returnees. In 1998, UNHCR was forced to suspend its group repatriation scheme for returnees from Pakistan and was unable to resume it in 1999. The situation is particularly critical in western Afghanistan, where the influx from the Islamic Republic of Iran has taxed the absorptive capacity of the already

underprivileged local communities in the area. Current difficulties in securing adequate international financial support for the refugees in their countries of asylum, but also upon return to Afghanistan, risk further eroding the principle of asylum in the region and compounding economic hardship for returnees and returnee-impacted communities in Afghanistan.

I. Drug control

56. Afghanistan produced up to one half of the world's opium in 1998, with an estimated yield of 2,102 tons of raw opium. Almost all opium poppy cultivation districts in Afghanistan are currently under the control of the Taliban. While the extent of drug abuse among the Afghan population is not quantified, it is clear that the use of opium, heroin and pharmaceutical drugs is a growing problem. The United Nations International Drug Control Programme is currently undertaking a pilot programme in order to address the causes and consequences of drug consumption and cultivation in Afghanistan.

57. With regard to drug trafficking, it is recognized that the conditions are currently not conducive to the initiation of support to law enforcement in Afghanistan, although the Programme continues to negotiate with the Taliban to ensure action against drug traffickers. As a result of persistent advocacy by the Programme, some 34 heroin-processing laboratories were dismantled in Nangarhar province by the Taliban, following a decree issued by Mullah Omar, Leader of the Taliban Movement.

58. In May 1999, the Taliban eradicated opium poppy fields in three Programme target districts in Kandahar province in order to fulfil the commitment, which the communities made to bring about a 20 per cent reduction in poppy cultivation in the 1998/1999 planting season. On the basis of information received from the authorities, it is estimated that 400 hectares of poppy fields have been eradicated.

J. Human rights

59. In recognition of the importance of gender and human rights concerns, a gender adviser and a human rights adviser have been appointed in the Office of the United Nations Coordinator. As a result, it has been possible to initiate work aimed at ensuring that assistance activities promote human rights and help to create an environment in which human rights are respected. In particular, it is intended to allow individuals, irrespective of gender, race, religion and social background, to participate in current civic affairs and in Afghanistan's future.

60. Specific activities have been developed to mainstream human rights and gender issues, such as workshops initiated by the gender adviser to define a common policy on gender, which take into account the constraints and opportunities of the prevailing situation. In addition, a consultative group has been established to develop proposals and operational tools geared to facilitating rights-based programming. Finally, a review of training needs and the development of a training programme on human rights for assistance agencies is under way. Despite the above, the harsh reality in Afghanistan is that restrictions on women and their right to education persist.

K. Prospects for the future

61. In Afghanistan, the determination to pursue synergy among all external actors and effectiveness in assistance programmes has gone further than in most other countries in crisis. Although the architecture of the Strategic Framework is in place, many challenges remain: to translate the objectives of the Strategic Framework into practical and common programming initiatives on the ground; to demonstrate, through strategic monitoring and other analytical work, that what is being done makes sense and has a durable impact; to show to the beneficiaries that the assistance community are responsive to their needs and to the donors that their investment in Afghanistan is sound and productive; and finally, to promote and encourage Afghan ownership of assistance programmes.

62. Given the commitment of the assistance community to principled common programming, the response to the 1999 consolidated appeal has been disappointing. Of the total US$ 184 million requested, only $44 million representing 24 per cent of total needs has been received. Coupled with the limited amount of carry-over funds available from 1998, the response to date presents a serious constraint to the effectiveness of the common approach. As a result, the assistance programme is in serious jeopardy of stalling in many vital areas.

63. The Afghanistan Support Group meeting held in Stockholm in June 1999 enabled the United Nations and non-governmental organization and donor communities to take stock of the lessons learned during 1999 and the steps needed to move ahead. Donors delivered a clear message to the United Nations and the non-governmental organization community that they felt that principled common

programming remained key to the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance. Donors recognized the constraints placed on the assistance community by the limited response to the consolidated appeal and pledged to provide greater support for the remainder of 1999.

64. The United Nations and non-governmental organization community are ready to move principled common programming into a phase of further improvement, and to start now with the preparations of the year 2000 Appeal as the principal tool for common programming. This will be the focus of the assistance community, at the central and regional level, during the period from July to December.

V. Assistance provided by Member States

65. In addition to the activities listed above, several Member States have provided the following information on assistance to Afghanistan, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 53/203 B.

66. The Government of Finland provided 12.2 million markkaa (Fim) of assistance to Afghanistan in 1998 and Fim 13 million in 1999. Of the latter amount, Fim 5 million was through the Finnish Red Cross, Fim 5 million through UNHCR and 3 million through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

67. In 1998, France provided 500,000 francs (F) to ICRC for emergency assistance to those affected by the earthquake in the north-east and chartered an emergency humanitarian flight (35 tons of freight) costing F 910,000.

68. In 1999, France provided humanitarian assistance in the amount of F 3.2 million, F 1 million of it through UNHCR, including F 500,000 for humanitarian demining; and the remainder through various non-governmental organizations for projects involving the rehabilitation of hospitals, the development of health-care systems in eastern Afghanistan, rural development, agricultural development centres and rehabilitation in areas stricken by earthquake in the north-east.

69. Since January 1998, India has provided 4.5 million rupees (Rs) worth of medicines, Rs 4.1 million worth of vegetable oil and Rs 1.7 million worth of medical equipment to Afghanistan.

70. In fiscal year 1998, the United States of America provided $6.7 million in emergency assistance to Afghanistan, including $1.5 million for earthquake victims. In fiscal year 1999, the United States has thus far committed $250,000 for humanitarian assistance.

VI. Concluding observations

71. The provision of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan has been particularly challenging in recent months, owing to the resumption of armed conflict and the resultant insecurity in the northern parts of the country. Natural disasters, in particular the earthquake near Kabul in February and recent epidemics, have further compounded the humanitarian crisis.

72. The absence of international United Nations personnel from August 1998 until March 1999 placed further constraints on humanitarian engagement in Afghanistan, even though national staff proved both resourceful and able in endeavouring to sustain basic life-saving activities. However, little progress could be achieved towards the implementation of the Strategic Framework, common programming, or the Memorandum of Understanding that had been signed with the Taliban authorities in May 1998. With the return of United Nations international staff to Kabul and other main centres in Afghanistan, some progress is being made in these areas, not least with regard to human rights and gender.

73. The failure of the peace talks and the resumption of fighting between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance has resulted in international assistance activities continuing to be implemented in a volatile and insecure environment. A durable political settlement remains the key to resolving the crisis in Afghanistan and to securing a stable future for its people. All humanitarian assistance, however indispensable, can only provide temporary relief until a sustained peace prevails in Afghanistan.